



Rhode Island Commission on Women

Position Paper on Women's Health

Women in the United States are more frequent users of health services than men, spend nearly two of every three health care dollars, and make three-fourths of household health care decisions. Yet, inattention to women's health issues in both research and clinical practice has resulted in serious gaps in knowledge about the causes, treatment, and prevention of diseases in women. This inattention has resulted in models of care based on a narrow population of men that do not include the needs and experiences of the diverse population of women. To address these inequities and to promote and improve the health of all women, the Rhode Island Commission on Women supports the following principles:

The Commission supports universal, affordable, accessible, high quality care for all women.

The Commission supports a holistic approach to women's health that recognizes and links the physical, psychological, social, cultural and educational needs of women throughout their lives. Women's health status should be considered across the life span. Unlike the traditional definition of and response to "women's health" that has been bound by reproductive issues often at the expense of women's comprehensive, lifelong health needs, this definition reflects the Commission's belief that women should and must be defined as whole, equal persons.

The Commission supports a woman's right to participate actively in decisions affecting her health. Meaningful participation requires an environment that supports autonomy, the opportunity to choose the most appropriate course of treatment, and access to clear, accurate, culturally-specific information.

The Commission supports an end to all forms of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender or gender orientation, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, primary language, age, marital status, health status or ability to pay, affecting women's health and women's access to quality care. Access to high quality, comprehensive, culturally appropriate health services should be available to all Rhode Island women. Primary preventive health care should include universal access to prenatal care for all women, as well as preventive health care screenings, services and health education.

The Commission supports equitable representation of women at all levels of decision-making, research and service delivery in the insurance and health care industries.

The Commission supports appropriate representation of women of diverse cultural, racial, ethnic, and social backgrounds in the national research agenda, to fulfill America's passion for scientific excellence and its vision for a just society with equality and fairness for all people.

Adopted by the Rhode Island Commission on Women January 11, 2000.